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ABSTRACT

An approach to help the line administrator conceptualize and direct institutional change is presented. Postsecondary institutions are described from a systems perspective and represented in a linear diagram to identify those areas that can become focal points for renewal activities. A three-dimensional typology provides a framework of alternative renewal strategies which may be characterized by their focus, scope (either institutional or sub-unit), and term or length of operation of the strategy. Seven "common-sense" principles which characterize institutional renewal were drawn from the typology. For example, the greater the scope, focus, and term of a strategy, the more reluctance it will meet and the more support it will need. The importance of the interplay between strategies for change and the environment in which the changes will occur is stressed and diagrammatically illustrated. Finally, the complete model for institutional renewal is presented and discussion focuses on two basic phases: (1) the preparation and planning phase, in which the administrator explores possibilities and develops a supportive environment, and (2) the implementation phase, in which the administrator may have to compromise between what is desirable and what is feasible in selecting strategies and goals. Further, the importance of careful and thorough evaluation is emphasized. (DB)

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EVALUATION FOR SURVIVAL: A MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

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Introduction

Postsecondary institutions are being challenged today, more than ever before, to adapt to new and varied external and internal pressures. Faculties want participative management, students want more relevance in programs, and governors want more effective use of resources. At the same time, government departments and the public-at-large call for increased controls on spending and greater accountability in institutional decision-making.

How can institutions respond to these pressures? What mechanisms enable institutions to adapt to a changing environment and to plan effectively in establishing educational priorities for the 1980's? And, more particularly, what guidelines for action might be available to help administrators initiate and successfully implement evaluation activities that will result in increased institutional effectiveness?

This paper rests upon a three-year study of renewal which included an extensive examination of research literature, visits at innovative colleges, and the development of a model of organizational renewal.[1] The paper presents a broad conceptual view of institutional renewal, outlining five specific stages, and identifies a series of propositions that could be helpful to an institution in establishing priorities for planning activities.

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[1] J. M. Small, A. G. Konrad, M. R. Hassen and B. W. Pickard, Renewal in Post-Secondary Institutions: An Analysis of Strategies. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, 1976.

Definitions

Institutional renewal is defined as a process whereby an institution ascertains its current condition, identifies the discrepancies between what is and what ought to be, and directs its activities toward the achievement of its desired state. In general, institutional renewal is a process involving five stages: (1) developing an awareness of need, (2) taking stock of current conditions, (3) identifying future images, (4) selecting an alternative strategy for bringing about desired changes, and (5) evaluating the action taken (Figure 1). Because the process of institutional renewal is iterative in nature, one must assume that, after an appropriate period of time, evaluation may result in the awareness of a new need which in turn leads through the whole cycle again. Thus, institutional renewal is an on-going process consistent with the notion of planned change.

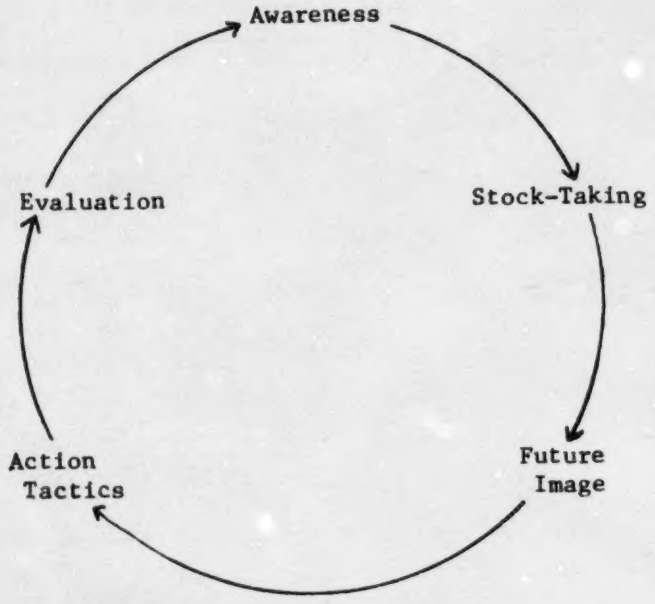

Figure 1

RENEWAL CYCLE

A renewal cycle is the sequence of events which may occur in implementing a renewal strategy, and which includes: awareness, stock-taking, future image, action tactics, and evaluation.

A strategy for renewal is a design or plan which specifies the focus, scope, and term of the undertaking and the desired outcomes (or goals). A strategy may indicate certain specific action tactics which will contribute to the goals of renewal.

The focus of a renewal strategy is determined by those components of the educational system (inputs, conversion, output) which are the objects of concern. A holistic renewal strategy is one which includes all three components as areas of direct interest.

The scope of a renewal strategy specifies operational parts of the institution which are objects of renewal. The scope may be limited to a sub-unit of the institution or include the total institution. Scope may be specified geographically (e.g. a particular component of the college's curricular offerings), or administratively (e.g. a functional unit within the college's administrative structure).

The term of a renewal strategy refers to the length of time required to develop and implement the strategy. It does not refer to the long-range impact of a renewal undertaking. For example, reorganization of an administrative structure may require a term of only several months, but the impact of the change could continue for years.

Goal hiatus is the gap between the present and desired situation with respect to any aspect of the institution. It represents the extent of change needed to attain a desired condition.

Inertia potential is a quality within any given strategy which

deters initial action. The nature of some strategies makes them easy to introduce, and these would be said to have low inertia potential.

Reluctance is the quality within people which is an inverse measure of their responsiveness to a particular strategy. If reluctance is high with respect to a change it will be difficult to gain commitment to that change.

Field force is the set of institutional and psychological forces (incentives and disincentives) which are operational at any particular time and which affect a decision to take or avoid action. These are dynamic forces capable of being consciously manipulated.

Systems View of an Institution

Renewal activities cover a broad spectrum in terms of extensiveness and impact upon an institution. In order to identify and characterize renewal activities a simple linear model of an institution was developed. Based essentially upon a systems theory of inputs, conversion, and outputs, Figure 2 provides a way of identifying those areas of organizational functioning which can become focal points for renewal activities. While some renewal activities clearly focus on one of these areas, some cover two or even all three areas.

Having defined renewal and conceptualized the functional aspects of a college in which renewal might occur it should be possible to develop a typology of renewal strategies and to offer some broad generalizations on some of the inherent qualities of the different strategies.

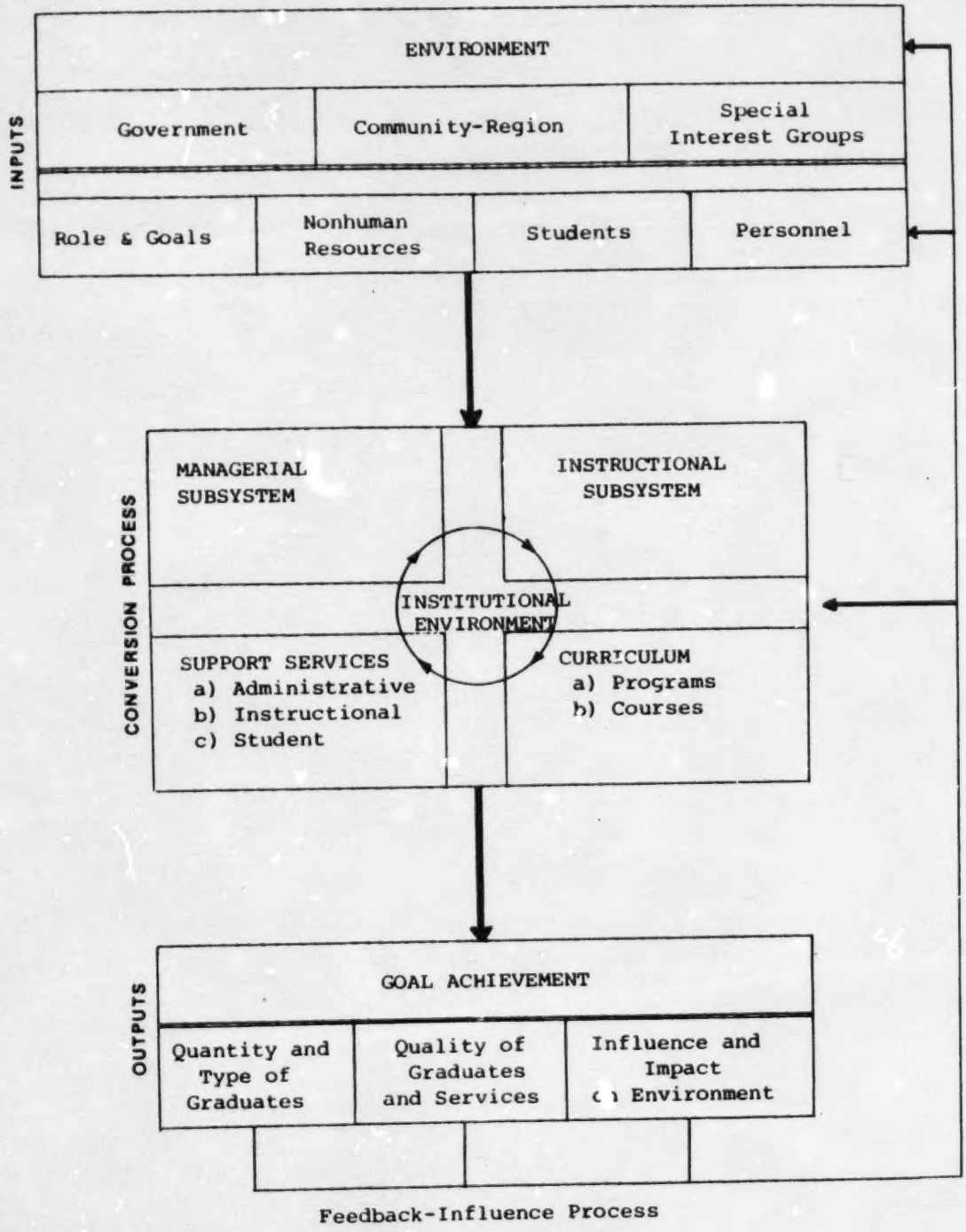

Figure 2

A Linear Representation of a Postsecondary Institution

Typology of Strategies

Renewal strategies may be characterized by their focus, scope and term (Figure 3). For our purposes, focus may be characterized as input, conversion, output, or holistic; scope as either institution or sub-unit; and term as short or long by some arbitrary distinction. In reality, all of these dimensions are more likely to be continuous than discrete, and in fact are treated as such later.

The three dimensional figure contains twelve cells, each representing a particular type of strategy. In addition the four layers labelled A, B, C, D represent four different holistic strategies. For example, a type 1 strategy focuses on inputs, is institutional in scope, and runs for a short term only. An illustration of this is a one-shot attempt to measure student needs and characteristics at the point of admission. As a renewal strategy, the desired outcome is a better understanding of incoming students.

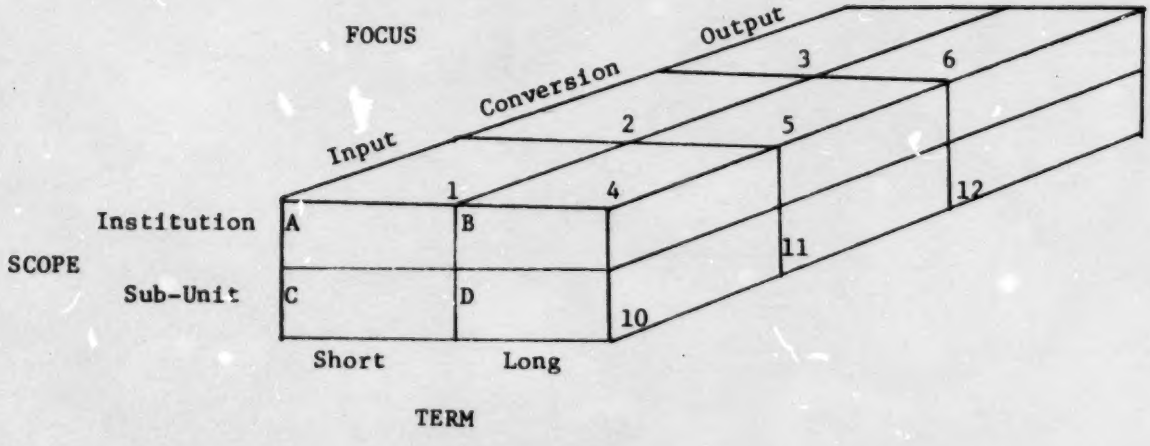

Figure 3

Typology of Strategies

If, on the other hand, the renewal design is a long term, total institutional effort with a holistic focus (type B), then student assessment is more appropriately considered to be a component of the renewal strategy. The value of the three-dimensional figure is that it provides a conceptual framework of alternative strategies which leads to useful propositions about renewal.

Propositions About Renewal

The following propositions have not been empirically derived or tested. They do, however, survive the test of "common sense" -- they are rationally founded. Some substantiating evidence was found in the literature of renewal, but a planned program of field observation and/or developmental research would be necessary to advance these propositions to the point of constituting a theory of renewal. The propositions are offered for two reasons: they are "new" in the sense of being derived from the typology of strategies created in this study and therefore merit exploration; they lead in turn to a set of guidelines, an action agenda, for the promulgation of renewal.

1. *The greater the scope of a renewal strategy the greater the inertia potential.* When the scope is greater more people and units within the institution are involved or affected. More people have to be won over, convinced, or co-opted. The overall resistance to the strategy is therefore likely to be relatively higher.
2. *The broader the focus the greater the inertia potential.* A strategy which concerns itself with input, conversion and output variables is likely to encounter more resistance than one which deals with only one set of factors.

3. *The longer the term the greater the inertia potential.* It is much harder to obtain commitment for a project which is protracted in nature than for one which can be quickly implemented and evaluated. Personal circumstances are less certain in the long term than in the short term; this element of the unknown acts as a deterrent to long term commitment. In addition, a long term project which does not receive favorable reaction in its early phases is more difficult to terminate than is a short term one in which assessment and a termination decision can be reached with less delay.

4. *The greater the inertia potential the greater the reluctance of personnel to participate.* This proposition serves to change the focus of interest from the renewal strategy to the people in the process. It does more than that, however; it poses a relationship between difficulty or challenge and responsiveness of institutional personnel. However, it does not necessarily assume a negative view of motivation, but rather acknowledges the fact that motivation is important in initiating action when the challenge is likely to be formidable.

5. *Reluctance bears a curvilinear relationship to goal hiatus; i.e. as goal hiatus increases from small to large, reluctance decreases to a minimum after which it increases.* When goal hiatus is very small there is little incentive to change practices for a relatively inconsequential gain. When goal hiatus is very great the gap between the actual and ideal is such as to appear unattainable. Somewhere between the two there is a point where the incentive for improvement is real and the goal is seen as attainable. At this

point reluctance is at its lowest.

6. *The greater the goal intensity the lesser the reluctance.* If the goal is a highly valued one there will be more willingness on the part of the faculty to work towards it than if the goal is seen to be of little importance.

7. *The greater the reluctance associated with any renewal strategy the greater the field-force support necessary for a productive action outcome.* This proposition is based upon Lewin's Field Force Theory[2] which contends that in any context there are forces both for and against change of a given type. The interplay of these forces produces a dynamic field ready to move in one direction or another. This field-force can be acted upon in such a way that the resulting forces move the institution in the desired direction. This proposition leads to a consideration of the interplay between environment and strategy, and consequent implications for leadership.

The Interplay of Environment and Strategy

No innovation or change in function or purpose is ever introduced in a vacuum. There is always an environment which is either supportive, resistive or both at the same time. The importance of recognizing and/or controlling the environment has been stressed in this paper. Figure 4 displays four possible situations in the interplay of environment and strategy.

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[2]Acknowledgement is given to the application of concepts presented in S.V. Martorana and E. Kuhns, Managing Academic Change, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

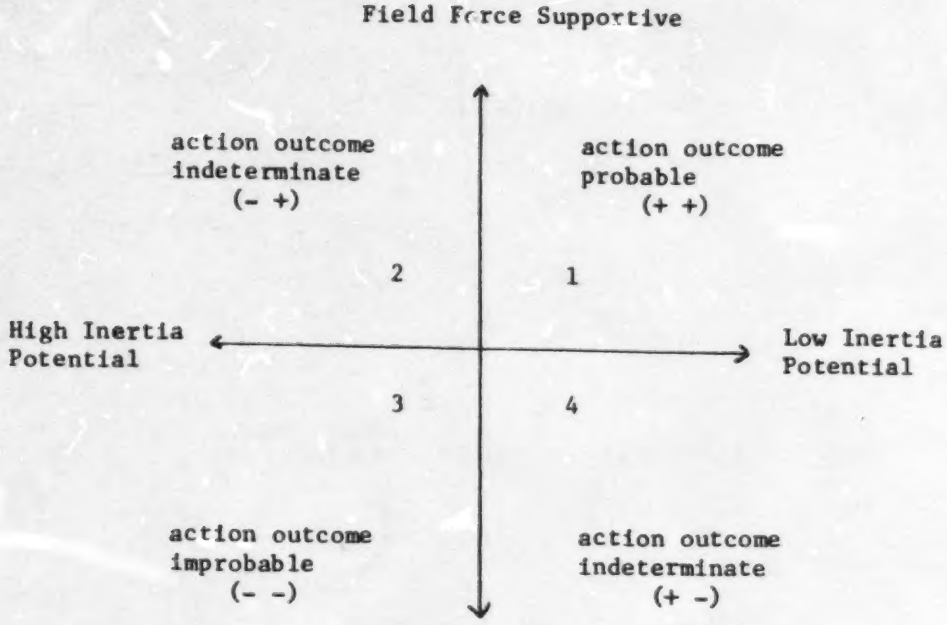

Figure 4
The Interplay of Environment and Strategy

If the environment is supportive and the inertia potential associated with a given strategy is low, the chances of successfully implementing the strategy are high (Quadrant 1). If the environment is not supportive and the inertia potential is high it is unlikely that the strategy can be introduced successfully (Quadrant 3). If the environment is supportive but the inertia potential high (Quadrant 2) or vice versa (Quadrant 4), the renewal strategy under consideration may or may not be acceptable depending upon prevailing forces. It is important to remember, however, that factors in the environment can be controlled and strategies can be selected to avoid the situation represented by Quadrant 3.

In a situation where there are predominant forces against a given renewal strategy, a different strategy should be chosen, or the climate of support strengthened by appropriate leadership actions. With this idea in mind some guidelines for renewal can be offered. These may be considered as constituting a model for approaching educational renewal in a postsecondary institution (Figure 5).

Guidelines for Renewal

The model for institutional renewal helps to focus attention on the role of the responsible administrator. In the final analysis, the administrator bears the responsibility for the success or failure of any renewal activity. A period of planning and preparation is recommended to increase the prospects of a successful renewal program. A decision to initiate the renewal cycle should be taken only when the administrator is reasonably sure of the likelihood of constructive action. The model indicates two main phases of renewal: (1) planning and preparation and (2) implementation.

In the planning and preparation phase the administrator explores possibilities and develops a supportive environment. When he is satisfied that feasible and potentially effective renewal strategies exist, and that he can muster sufficient support to initiate a renewal program, then the administrator can proceed to the implementation phase.

In reaching a decision to initiate action the administrator may have to compromise between strategies which address important goals and those which are likely to receive the commitment of his staff. In the first instance, his awareness of the need for change will point to, or

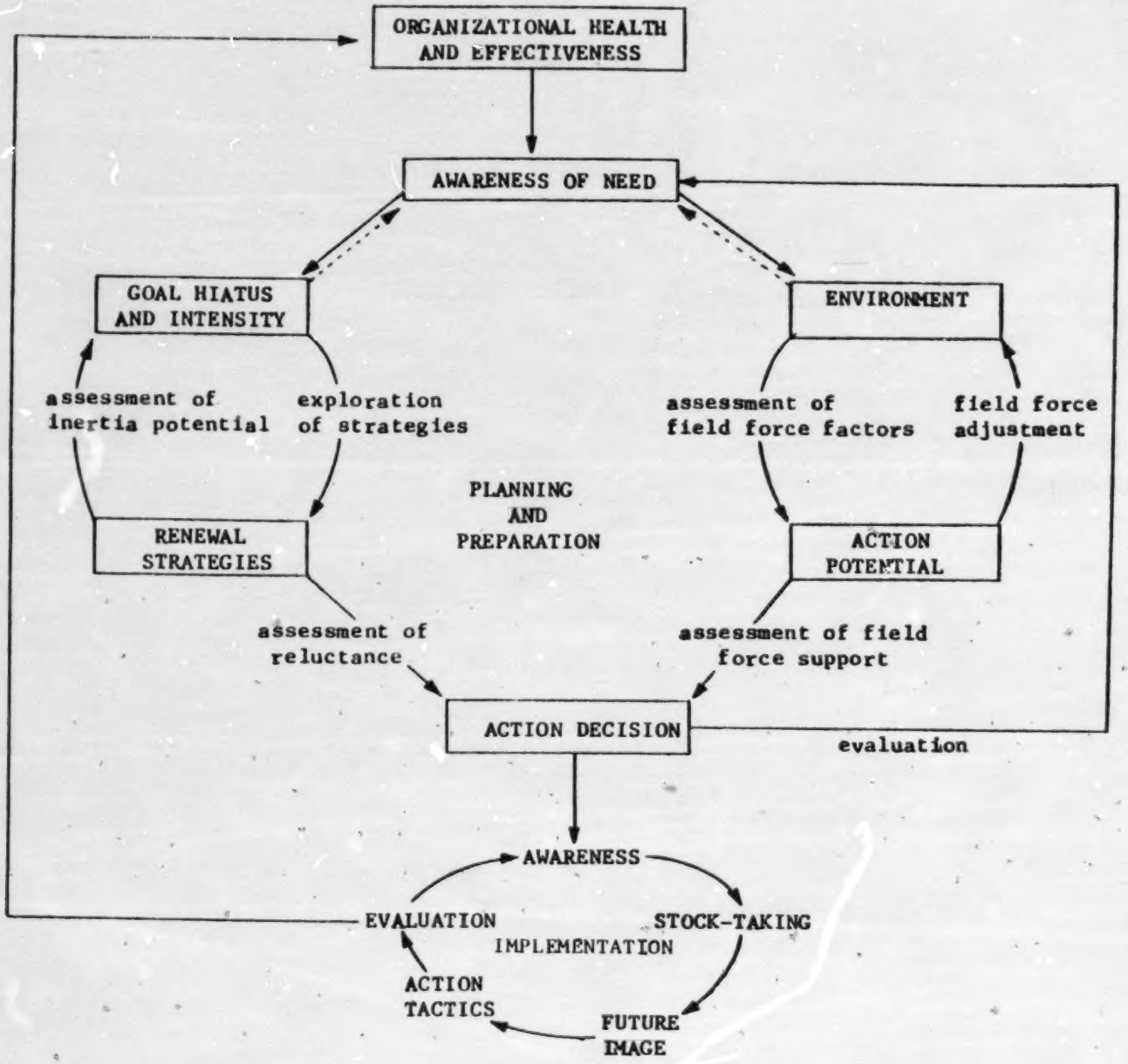

FIGURE 5
A MODEL FOR INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

stem from, discrepancies between the actual and desired states within his institution. These states will give rise to a variety of possible goals for renewal. From a range of strategies those relevant to the most important goals are selected. Using factors such as term, scope and focus he can assess the inertia potential of the strategies under consideration, compromising between desirability and feasibility, if necessary. This cycle of consideration will eventually result in a number of workable strategies which should be of value to the institution.

Simultaneously, a second cycle of development is undertaken. The administrator must consider his institution's unique external and internal environment and assess the probability of group action consistent with his aims. It may be necessary to withold any effort to initiate renewal until he has had the opportunity to develop a climate of support equal to the task, or until an opportune moment presents itself. A decision to advance to the phase of implementation may be taken when a renewal cycle is likely to be productive.

When a renewal program is undertaken it is very important that the cycle of activities includes evaluation to establish the extent to which the goals of the specific program have been achieved. This evaluation might lead to another cycle of renewal activities arising from further awareness of need. Two other functional aspects of evaluation are worth noting. When a renewal program is implemented there will inevitably be some consequences for the institution as a whole. The long range goal of renewal is improved organizational health and effectiveness. Each renewal program should be seen as a

contribution towards this end. Evaluation is needed to determine if this is the case. If a renewal program fulfills its immediate purposes but the processes or products are in any way detrimental to the institution, then it is important that the administrator be aware of these effects and take appropriate corrective measures in the planning and preparation stages of other renewal programs.

One further aspect of evaluation is that which stems from the administrator's decision to take action. Whether or not this results in the implementation of a renewal cycle, the decision should be evaluated to develop further insights into conditions of the institution and its need for renewal.

Conclusion

From the study of the literature of renewal it is clear that many approaches have been used to renew and improve the effectiveness of postsecondary institutions. Some of these can be considered grand scale onslaughts on the total institution or a major portion of it, while others are more focused and limited in their approach. A common concern, however, is the question on initiative: who is responsible for, or most likely to initiate, renewal activities? And through what actions should this initiative proceed? Since renewal inevitably entails the commitment of resources, human and non-human, sooner or later renewal hinges upon the support and commitment of a responsible administrator.

Equally important is the commitment of those persons whose habits of work will be affected during the process of renewal or by

its outcomes. The grass-roots initiation of any change is very appealing idealogically -- the workers at the service level of an organization perceive the need for change in their operation and communicate their feeling to a manager who then provides the backing and support for new procedures, or the exploration of such. But more frequently, in the case of colleges and universities, it appears that faculty members tend to resist change, while administrators and students support it.[3]

Regardless of the accuracy of this perception it is beyond dispute that administrators, sooner or later (and probably sooner), have to become involved personally in dealing with renewal. In this paper, therefore, the focus has been on the line administrator who, by virtue of his authority or influence, is a central figure in renewal.

This paper has outlined a concept of renewal which gives the administrator wide latitude in determining the "soft" spots in his institution which might be appropriate objects of a renewal undertaking. It offers an approach based upon a theory which has its foundations in established practice. While no formulation of principles can guarantee a successful outcome it may help the administrator to avoid classical errors such as imposing pat solutions to ill-conceived problems or, worse still, allowing his organization to drift in the groundswell of random forces with no one at the tiller.

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[3] G. Budig and D. Rives, Academic Quicksand, Lincoln, Nebraska, Professional Educators Publications, Inc. 1973, pp. 19-20.

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